

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended): A starter strip comprising:
 - a fastener flange;
 - a siding support element connected to the flange;
 - a spacer element connected to the siding support element, wherein the spacer element includes:
 - a spacing component connected to the siding support element,
 - an angle component connected to the spacing component, and
 - a bottom component connected to the angle component, the bottom component including a first and second horizontal component and a connecting piece; and
 - a flashing element connected to the spacer element.
2. (Original) The starter strip of claim 1, wherein the starter strip is comprised of an extruded plastic material.
3. (Original) The starter strip of claim 1, wherein the starter strip is comprised of a folded metal.
4. (Original) The starter strip of claim 1, wherein the siding support element includes a front face and the spacer element includes an angle component, and wherein the front face of the support element and the angle component of the spacer element are inclined at an equal angle away from vertical.
5. (Original) The starter strip of claim 4, wherein the angle is 3 degrees.
6. (Original) The starter strip of claim 3, wherein the siding support element further includes a first and second horizontal member which are substantially perpendicular to the fastener flange.

7. (Canceled).

8. (Currently Amended) The starter strip of claim ~~7~~ 1, wherein the bottom component is substantially U-shaped and ~~includes a first and second horizontal component and a connecting piece.~~

9. (Original) The starter strip of claim 8, wherein the first and second horizontal components include at least one drain opening.

10. (Original) The starter strip of claim 1, wherein the flashing element includes horizontal member and a vertical member.

11. (Original) The starter strip of claim 10, wherein an end of the horizontal member terminates at a point even with the plane of the fastener flange.

12. (Original) The starter strip of claim 10, wherein an end of the horizontal member extends beyond the plane of the fastener flange.

13. (Original) The starter strip of claim 12, wherein the width of the horizontal member corresponds substantially to the width of a sheathing material.

14. (Original) The starter strip of claim 8, wherein the first horizontal component of the bottom component is approximately one-quarter inch below a horizontal member of the flashing element when the starter strip is oriented in an installed position.

15. (Currently Amended): A building system comprising the starter strip of claim 1, and further comprising::

a building structure comprising

a foundation,

a sill plate installed on and substantially even with the foundation,

wall studs attached to and substantially even with the sill plate, and

a sheathing attached to an outside surface of the wall studs and sill plate and having a bottom edge which terminates at the bottom edge of the sill plate;

wherein ~~the horizontal member of the flashing element~~ has a horizontal member that is flush against the bottom edge of the sheathing and terminates at a top edge of the foundation.

16. (Original) The building system of claim 15, further including a siding panel, wherein a bottom edge of the siding panel abuts a bottom component of the spacer element.

17. (Original) The building system of claim 16, wherein the siding panel is a fiber cement lap siding panel.

18. (Currently Amended) A building system including the starter strip of claim 1, the building system further comprising:

a building structure comprising
a foundation,
a sill plate installed on the foundation,
wall studs attached to and substantially even with the sill plate, and
a sheathing attached to an outside surface of the wall studs and sill plate and having an outside surface which is even with an outside surface of the foundation;

wherein ~~the horizontal member of the flashing element~~ has a horizontal member that terminates at a top edge of the foundation.

19. (Original) The building system of claim 1, further including a siding panel, wherein a bottom edge of the siding panel abuts a bottom component of the spacer element.

20. (Currently Amended) A method of installing a lap siding panel using the starter strip of claim 1, comprising the steps of:

providing a building structure having a foundation, a sill plate installed on and substantially even with the foundation, wall studs attached to and substantially even with the sill plate, and a sheathing attached to an outside surface of the wall studs and sill plate and having a bottom edge which terminates at the bottom edge of the sill plate;

abutting ~~the~~a horizontal member of the flashing element of the starter strip against the bottom edge of the sheathing, and

fastening the starter strip to the sheathing.

21. (Original) The method of claim 20, further comprising installing a siding panel on the starter strip by abutting a bottom edge of the siding panel and a bottom component of the spacer element.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21, wherein the step of installing the siding panel further includes nailing the siding panel through the siding support element of the starter strip and into the sheathing of the building structure.